

Datastream Connexion Gears Up for Agile

Seapine Agile Training Helps Team Fine-Tune Their Agile Processes

How do you develop software for customers who aren't sure what they want at first? If you're Datastream Connexion, you use an iterative, Agile methodology.

"Often, our customers have a vague concept in mind that requires iterative refinement," said CEO Eric Hoffman, "and Agile is perfect for those types of projects."

Datastream Connexion delivers innovative software using web technologies, such as creating a secure collaboration and reporting portal to support national food emergency response laboratories. The company already practiced Scrum, but Hoffman felt they could benefit from formal training because there was a lack of mutual understanding of the day-to-day details of the practice among the team members. To help the team fine-tune their Agile processes and learn more about Agile concepts, Hoffman enrolled everyone in Seapine Software's [Agile Essentials for Project Teams](#) class.

Getting the Entire Team on the Same Page

Everyone involved with client projects participated in the training. This included Patricia Hunter, a project manager for the National Center for Food Protection and Defense at the University of Minnesota, which is working with Datastream Connexion on the Food Emergency Response Network. "I'm a certified Project Management Professional (PMP), coordinating work between the two teams," Hunter said.

Seapine's two-day class provides a hands-on approach to learning about key roles on an Agile team, how to participate in an Agile team, and Agile project success factors. The class, taught by an experienced Agile instructor and practitioner, is intended for all members of an Agile team regardless of their role or level of experience. It not only provides knowledge of Agile concepts and terminology, but also improves communications among Agile team members.

According to Alan Bustamante, who leads Seapine's Agile Services team, the class provides a baseline of knowledge in terminology and practice, and prepares team members to work together in an Agile environment. Bustamante notes that the class includes both lectures and exercises, which makes for an active class and provides Agile messages in different delivery formats.

What made the course highly compelling to the participants was its hands-on nature, combined with a knowledgeable and engaging instructor. Attendees participated in team-based exercises that use role-playing to reinforce the concepts explained during the class.

"It was useful for all of us to take the training at the same time, so we were all exposed to the same concepts and were able to build a team consensus and excitement about the benefits of improving our Agile processes."

Patricia Hunter
Project Manager

For example, in one exercise, a group was given a complete description of a tow truck and had to deliver a Lego model of the truck at the end of the exercise. A second group was given a less complete description, but was able to solicit feedback during the building process. While the first group created a useful truck by the end of the exercise, it didn't actually meet the needs of the customer. The second group, which received regular feedback, delivered a product that was much closer to the needs of the customer. Barb Sannon, technical coordinator for Datastream Connexion, explained that this exercise drove home the need for regular software demonstrations and deliveries as well as the value of ongoing feedback. "The purpose of the exercise immediately clicked for all of us."

From Learning to Doing

Datastream Connexion anticipates that the two days spent in training will have an immediate impact on their Agile process and team communications. "One of our biggest issues was that many of us had differing understandings of the terminology and process, and we weren't working with the same information," said Hoffman. "We're not doing that now."

Bustamante agreed. "My goal is to provide a common terminology, and to reinforce that terminology through exercises throughout the class. The combination makes the concepts relevant to attendees' Agile practices."

Hoffman also believes the class will provide longer-term benefits. "We anticipate being able to work better with our customers, to deliver software when they can review it, and to better incorporate their feedback," he said. "It's beneficial for our team, and our customers will see better software over the course of a project."